

Some distinguishing features of Hinduism.

(By Swami Akhandanand Saraswati)

Dharma the basis of Purusharthas

Though the words 'Dharma' and 'Iswara' (God) are etymologically different, in essence they are not so. Both the words mean a regulator or ruler. Just as God manifests Himself as the Ruler (of this universe) rule (laws governing the universe) and the object rules (the universe itself, consisting of its countless Jivas), even so Dharma manifests itself as the holder or sustainer of creation, the act of holding and the object held. Being fully established in Dharma means being fully established in God, or in the Self. Virtues like truth, non-violence, contentment, love etc., or acts like service, worship etc., which are helpful in getting oneself established in Dharma, are also included in Dharma. These latter con-

stitute the means, whereas the state of being fully established in Dharma is the end. In this way, Dharma is both a means and an end in itself.

'Purushartha'

Not that Dharma is a Purushartha (an end) only in the sense pointed out above and a means to an end in the form of virtues or acts (of worship etc.) in order to understand this, it is necessary to analyse the meaning of the Word 'Purushartha.' 'Purushartha' is that which a 'purusa' or individual seeks or craves for. What does an individual seek? He seeks happiness, which knows no end. Such happiness lies only in the Atma or Paramatma (God). He stands eternally realised. Then, what are the obstacles to his realisation? Desire is

the only obstacle to the realisation of Supreme happiness or God. What is the origin of desire? Desire arises when the individual feels something lacking in him, some hiatus or want. When Dharma has been truly realised, that is, when the individual has established himself in the Infinite, he does not feel any hiatus, desires no longer trouble him, and consequently he never feels unhappy or miserable. That is the state of Supreme happiness. If action is performed without any selfish motive, without feeling any sense of want, making action the end in itself,—success in the action not being regarded in its external aspect, but in advancing life towards perfection,—and during the performance of the action, if the performer continues to remember his Self being present in all and feels the nearness of God, then all his thoughts and sentiments, and all his actions become Purusharthas in themselves.

To be in a state of health is Dharma. Here the word 'Health' is used not in its external or narrow sense, but in its deepest or real sense. To

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remove distemper and maintain health,—herein lies the fulfilment of all observances and practices of Dharma. What is distemper? In a word, it may be defined as the outgoing tendency, the secular trend of the mind. To check and control this is the function of Dharma. None can realise true happiness and abiding peace by transgressing the laws and neglecting the duties of Dharma. Whatever an individual may aspire for—viz, wealth, progeny or salvation—he must take recourse to Dharma for its realisation. No work can be fully accomplished with an unhealthy mind, a mind which is tainted and distracted by desires, a mind that aimlessly wanders in many directions. Dharma alone is the best means of purifying the mind and directing it towards a region where there is Bliss and nothing but Bliss.

A State, nation or individual having an anti-Dharmic attitude may enjoy prosperity for a short while; but in the end it or he will be betrayed by the mind and will be caught in the grip of rivalry,

quarrel, and mutual destruction. Throwing into power a Lenin or a Stalin, Russia has not attained happiness, nor is it possible for her to attain happiness without taking recourse to Dharma. Systems of government in other countries are running and can run only so long as there is any element of Dharma in them, even to-day they are not free from unrest, anxiety and fear. If we make a psychological study of the problem and consider the keenness, for worldly enjoyments, of other nationalities, it will become evident to us as to why the Scriptures declare India to be land of Spirituality (Dharmakshetra) and other countries of the world to be the lands of worldly enjoyment. We have nothing to say with regard to those who blindly imitate the West; but if we look to the lofty ideals of Hinduism, we shall discover that Dharma is the goal of all aspirations of the Hindus and it is through Dharma alone that they seek the gratification of their desires. Thus, it can be boldly proclaimed, without any hesitation, that it is an extra-

ordinary feature of Hinduism that it regards Dharma as the basis of other Purusharthas, as also a Purusartha in itself.

Supreme peace in Truth, knowledge and bliss.

Such a cosmopolitan and liberal conception of Dharma has been adopted by Hinduism because this conception was discovered, preached and propagated by saints who had attained perfection. What do we understand by attainment of perfection? This question may be answered in various ways. All religious systems have answered this question according to the intellectual level at which they stand and the stage of evolution reached by them. But if these answers are analysed, they will be found to be deficient in one or other. The definition of 'Perfection' given by Hinduism is perfect in all respects. All other definitions are covered by this definition. What is our relation with the world and the objects of the world? In what relation do other people and nations stand to us? In answer to this, some have put forward

the relation of brotherhood, and some that of a neighbour, as the ideal. These relations are no doubt good in themselves, but they have scope for differences of opinion and quarrels. Hinduism, however, asserts that all are our very Self, all are but one,—the suffering and happiness of one are the suffering and happiness of another. The cultivation of this feeling of oneness or unity of soul is the best means of promoting universal peace.

To prove the Oneness of life-unity of the soul and the character of the soul as Sat, Chit and Ananda, there are many arguments and methods advanced by the Hindu Scriptures. There is neither space nor occasion for dealing with them all here. We shall only try briefly to bring out the implication of the term 'Sachidananda'. 'Sat' means existence, to be, in other words, the Soul Exists. I am. What am I? Am I the body and the vital airs? Am I the mind, or am I something else? Even though I am conscious of my existence, have I got any idea of the

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magnitude of my being? It seems I have forgotten this. When the true nature of my Self is realised, then it transpires that I am the only reality. Space, time and whatever else is perceived within the circumference of space and time are not apart from me, I alone exist, I alone am. The Self alone exists. 'Chit' means to know, knowledge. The Self is knowledge; in other words, I know. What do I know? Really speaking, I know everything; but I am not conscious of this knowledge. Certainly I do not know things separated from me by distances of time and space and screened from my view by other intervening objects. But it is I who know their absence. Are not the conceptions about them creations of my mind? If that is so, then I know everything. The existence of a thing is proved only by the fact that I know it. Nay, even the existence of the individual who proves the existence of a thing depends on my cognition of him. Thus I know, and know the whole; therefore I am Chit or

knowledge. When the Sat is realised, the Self alone remains. Sorrow, fear, death all vanish; and through realisation of Chit the woe of ignorance is gone. Now, 'Ananda' (Bliss) alone remains, there is nothing else to disturb it. It is desire that disturbs Ananda (Bliss), and desire originates from the sense of duality. When all are reduced to the Self, which is an indisputable fact, then it becomes self-evident that I am Bliss itself. Ignorance of this blissful nature of the Self is the cause of bondage, and the tearing away of this veil of Ignorance is freedom (Mukti). Mukti is nothing beyond this. He who has realised this freedom moves about in the world free from attachment and hatred, looking upon all with an equal eye, and established in perpetual peace. Really speaking, this is an indescribable state; nevertheless, all these things have been said just to give an indication, to the reader, of this highest distinguishing feature of Hinduism.

God Fulfils The Desire of Devotee.

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While recognizing the soul as the only reality in the absolute sense, Hinduism also recognizes the whole field of phenomenal existences and provides for their proper regulation. Two kinds of phenomena are observed in the world of relativity—Matter and Spirit. Matter is both animate and inanimate and the Spirit also is divided into two categories, the Jiva (individual soul) and Iswara (the Universal soul or God). The Jiva is a particle of God, and through love of its whole, Iswara, gets merged into the same, or attains nearness to the same. Matter, both animate and inanimate, is a product of Prakrti (the prime Cause). At the time of Dissolution (Pralaya), both these types of material bodies get merged into Prakrti; while at the time of Creation, through agitation in Prakrti they come out of her again. The Jiva who does not get united with God through His worship, is merged into Prakrti at the time of Dissolution. During the subsequent creation, he reawakens according to his past Samskaras or latencies and begins to wander from

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birth to death and from death to birth again. In the interest of the Jiva, that is, for his spiritual benefit, God lays down regulations about Dharma and Adharma, righteous conduct and unrighteous conduct, and commands him through saints and the Scriptures that he should gradually rid himself of the two lower Gunas or modes of Prakruti viz., Tamas and Rajas, and attain the state of Sattva (Purity), and by developing Bhakti (Devotion) and Jnana (Knowledge of Self) attain or realise God. But the Jiva, being a slave of his natural impulses, does not want to shake off the domination of Rajas and Tamas and begins to break the laws of Dharma. This leads to the growth of demoniacal propensities, and God, who is the maker of the laws, has Himself to take steps for their protection. From time to time, He deposes Devas and Rishis for this purpose, and when it becomes absolutely indispensable, comes down Himself on earth as an Incarnation. It is but natural for Him to appear for the protection of Dharma.

■ The integral and all-em-
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bracing consciousness of God is symbolically represented as describing a full circle made up of sixteen digits (Kala) like the digits of the sun as conceived in Indian Astronomy. Among the four viviparous creatures or broad divisions of earthly life, viz. the vegetable kingdom, the sweat-born creatures (insects), the oviparous creatures (birds and reptiles) and the animal kingdom (Jarayuja), there is gradual unfoldment of consciousness rising from one digit in the vegetable kingdom to four digits in the animal kingdom and five digits in man. Mahapurusas (highly advanced souls or superman) may develop from six to eight digits of consciousness. The mind of man is not endowed with the capacity of developing a higher degree of consciousness than this. That is why for developing a higher degree of consciousness a divine body becomes necessary. Bhagvan Shri Krishna represents the fullest manifestation of Divinity and as such embodies all the sixteen digits of consciousness.

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Like the body of a Jiva, the Body of an Avatara (Direct manifestation of God) is not brought into existence by past Karma: it is brought into existence by the will of God Himself, who takes that form out of compassion for the Jiva.

Protection of Dharma itself is a sufficient reason for the advent of an Avatara. But this can be accomplished by God by sheer force of Will. Therefore, considering from the point, it appears that it is the devotee's longing which makes God reveal Himself. Take for instance, the case of a devotee who has made a firm resolve to establish direct relation with God, either as child, friend or father. God, being omniscient, has a direct knowledge of his desire, and He can appear in the relation of a child, friend or father in as much as He is all-powerful. He is bound to satisfy the

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desire of his obstinate devotee because He is extremely compassionate. Under the circumstance, there is no reason why He should not appear on earth as an Avatara.

The practical side of Vedanta also proves the phenomenon of God's Descent out of love for His devotees, for the protection of Dharma and for turning the minds of the Jivas inward through contemplation of His glories, sports and Beauty. Even in the absolute sense, the divinity of an Avatara cannot be denied, because in that sense nothing exists but God. According to the conception of the devotees, there are many varieties of Avatara—Prabhava, Vaibhava, Avesa, Sphurti, Amsa, Kala, Purna and so on. The deity residing in a personal form in the Divine regions of Goloka, Saketa, Kailasa, etc., comes down with the entire Region (Dharma) together with His

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Divine consort and His other subsidiary manifestations known as Vyuhas, His associates and other paraphernalia, and enacting His divine sports on earth blesses His devotees and propagates Love and Devotion in the world.

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These things can be understood and appreciated only through deep reverence, exclusive devotion and supreme love. They are beyond the province of logic. The Doctrine of Avatara is supremely helpful in spreading the

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message of hope and contentment and inculcating purity of heart and divine thoughts, and constitutes another distinguishing feature of Hinduism.

The wheel of Karma

Consciously or unconsciously some form of Karma is being enacted every moment of life. Broadly speaking, four varieties of Karma have been recognized, Sanchita (accumulated or reserve stock), prarabdha (that which has already begun to bear fruit), Kriyamana (Present action) and Agami (Future action). Kriyamana (Present action) is the root of all. It is Kriyamana which is transformed into Sanchita and Prarabdha is formed out of a portion of Sanchita. It is kriyamana again, which forms the basis of future actions. Therefore, scrupulous care should be taken in moulding out Kriyamana or present actions.

We observe a multitude of diversities in the world,—e.g., a certain individual is rich, while another is poor; one is ailing, while another is healthy; one is happy, while another is oppressed by misery, and so on. How is this to be accounted for? Why has God,

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who recognised all as His own images, nay, His very self, created this difference? It is Hinduism alone which gives a satisfactory answer to this question. The answer lies in that we find that the experiences of Jivas at the present moment are a result of their past actions, and whatever actions are performed now will inevitably bear fruit in the future. The present experience (of pain or pleasure) cannot but be the reaction of past actions, and whatever is being done now can never go in vain. These are the main arguments in support of the doctrine of Rebirth. Future life or birth is brought about by these very actions; therefore, it lies entirely in our hands to make or mar it. We are the masters of our own fate. All living beings are revolving on this wheel of Karma. This supplies an answer to the above question.

The promulgators of other faiths did not bestow much thought on the method of improving the tone of our present actions and the means of obtaining release from the bondage of Karma, because they failed to grasp the truth

about the binding nature of Karma. If they have tackled the problem of action at all, they have done so only with a view to adjusting social relations. Hindu Religion has treated the question comprehensively in all its bearings. Why Karma goes on incessantly, and how to get out of its clutches, is a question of philosophy. This has been discussed in a comprehensive way in the philosophical literature of Hinduism.

Having forgotten or failed to recognize the glory of his real self or his true nature as Sat-Chit-Ananda (Existence, Knowledge and Bliss), the Jiva was possessed by the desire for happiness and consequently the knocking about for the satisfaction of the same began. Consciousness, through ignorance, of the existence of something else apart from him; the feeling of desirability or undesirability in respect of the same, attraction for what appears desirable and repulsion for what appears as undesirable; efforts for attaining the desirable and avoiding the undesirable; accumulation of the latencies of attraction and

repulsion, rebirth according to these latencies and impulses; this process according to the nature of birth has been going on from eternity and can end only with the disappearance of Ignorance, which lies at the root of all.

Ignorance is dispelled by knowledge. Knowledge appears in the pure heart. Purity of heart is attained by conquering the impulses of both attraction and hatred. Action which has no attraction or hatred at its back is disinterested action, and this, really speaking, is Dharma.

He who does not practise Dharma can neither reform his present life nor lay the foundation of a good life hereafter, escape from the cycle of births and deaths being out of question. It is due to this doctrine of Rebirth that Hinduism has been able to maintain intact its spiritual outlook, while other countries, whose goal of life is enjoyment and who do not believe in Rebirth, have lost even that amount of spirituality which they had accepted as an article of their faith.

Belief in the other world

The globe we inhabit is only a tiny part of the whole universe. Who knows what an infinite number of universes are dancing in the infinite space? Even in a single universe, there are many lokas and many sheaths. Owing to the variety of their Karma, the Jivas obtain different bodies and live in different forms. The bodies of earthly beings such as men, animals and birds can be perceived with the naked eye, the element of earth being predominant in them. Even of these latter, there are some so minute that they cannot be perceived with the naked eye and the help of instruments has to be taken to see them. Even so, there are bodies in which the element of water, fire, air or ether is predominant which cannot be perceived even with the help of earthly instruments. These five elements, again, have their subtle or Sattvic forms and bodies formed of these latter possess only the sheaths of Vital Air and mind—Pranamaya Kosa and Manomaya Kosa, and no sheath of the earthly element (anna-Chintamani]

maya Kosa). These bodies have their own respective regions (Loka), enjoyments, associates and attendants, appropriate to their Karma or desires. Classes of Jivas are formed according to a general similarity of their Karmas, although there may be slight differences in particulars, and this is how they are divided into various species such as Devas, Pitrs, Gandharvas, Kinnaras and so on, residing in the higher regions. Evil and malignant spirits such as ghosts and genii also possess bodies made of such subtle elements. All these classes are included in the category of Jivas, but Devas and pitrs possess higher powers by virtue of their Karma, and should we be able to propitiate them, our worldly activities can meet with greater success and even our spiritual efforts can fructify without any rub or hindrance.

The Devas function also as presiding deities. The microcosm is a replica of the macrocosm. For instance, the Lord of Amaravati, the capital city of the devas is Indra. In our terrestrial region, he is the presiding deity

of the East; in the human body, he is the deity presiding over our arms. Worship of Indra is, therefore, necessary for acquiring strength of arm (muscular strength), for making the East propitious, and for attaining an abode in Heaven. Similarly, success can be attained by propitiating the deities presiding over the various elements such as earth, water, air etc. and the various organs of sense such as eyes, ears etc.. There is ample evidence in our ancient scriptures to show that through worship and propitiation of Devas, the Hinduism of ancient times attained success in the use of extraordinarily powerful weapons, in plying aerial cars according to their will, going unhampered wherever they liked, and in thought-reading etc..

The worship of the Pitrs (manes) occupies an important place in Hinduism. From the time of the Vedas up to the present day, all great souls and authorities on Hinduism who succeeded in unravelling the secrets of the occult world have unanimously emphasised its importance,

obtained first-hand knowledge of the occult worlds (Pitrloka and others) by television and by visiting those worlds through their occult powers; and whatever they have written in respect of those worlds is absolutely correct and accurate. How to perform Sradha so that our offerings may actually reach the Pitrs and ancestral spirits is a science by itself. This grand, all comprehensive view of Hinduism astounds imagination. The proper performance of the ceremony of Sradha not only gives satisfaction to the departed soul, but brings great benefit to the performer himself.

The yoke of discipline

The Scriptures declare that in the beginning of creation Sattvaguna (the principle of harmony) prevailed in nature. The whole human race consisted mainly of the Brahmans and all of them were devoted to study and meditation. Then gradually the elements of Rajas and Tamas began to develop; under the impulse of past actions, the active propensities of Jivas began to gain ground, and turning their face towards the world

they embarked on a course which landed them into the mire of sloth, error and delusion and tended to estrange them from the soul. God Himself then divided them into four classes considering their respective traits, activities, predilections, inclinations and capacity and laid down rules for the regulation of their lives, so that their undisciplined senses and wayward impulses may not drag them along the path of degradation and self-abasement. Four Varnas or orders of society were instituted, classifying men according to their respective tendencies or faculties, viz. the intellectual faculty, the faculty of administration, the faculty of charity or benevolence and the faculty of service.

Similarly the whole span of life was divided into four stages or Asramas, of which the first was characterised by an emphasis on Dharma, the second by an emphasis on Artha, the third by an emphasis on Kama (desire to attain heaven Brahmaloaka, etc.) and the fourth by an emphasis on renunciation. Declaring the four Varnas (orders of

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society) to be the limbs of the Cosmic Body God saved the human beings from being thrown into confusion of castes (वर्णसंकर) and overlapping of duties (कर्मसंकर). The rules differed according to differences of climate, time, circumstances, and the power and capacity of the individuals. The intellectual side (Vijnanmaya Kosa) being more developed in man, his duties were characterised by an emphasis on the intellect, whereas the duties of the other sex were marked by an emphasis on Tapas (Penance), in as much as the emotional side (Manomaya Kosa) is more developed in the woman than in man. Thus, even though the goal was the same, various rules were made for guiding the Jivas along different paths according to the diversity of their Karma. Just as in the human body, even so in spite of the differences among the Brahmans, the Kshatriyas, the Vaisyas and the Sudras, the Hindu Society, consisting of the four Varnas, is one society, one body. And though the duties of the different parts differ according to the capacity of

each, the goal of all is the same. The rules framed for each group are sufficient to deliver people from the bondage of worldly existence and lead them to God-Realization.

Any nation of the world, which does not bind its life with social restrictions and scriptural laws can neither make any spiritual progress, nor can it make its earthly life peaceful and happy. There is no doubt that the system of Varnasrama is getting disorganised these days. But it is hardly justified to deny the very principle of Varnasrama, judging the system from its present diseased form. Instead of trying to demolish it, we should direct our energies towards protecting it and restoring it to its value and regulate our lives and conduct according to its principles. Attainment of perfection in spiritual life is impossible without scrupulous observance of the rules of Varnasrama Dharma. It is indeed, a matter for pride that Hinduism has embraced this system from the very beginning of its career and held on to it up to the present day, in whatever form it may be.

The role of Samskaras

Whatever a man does in his present life, and whatever he feels and thinks; are determined not only by the actions of his previous births, but also by the actions, feelings and thoughts of his parents, as also by those of his present life. It has been observed and is also proved by scientific investigation that the state of mind of the parents at the time of conception invariably casts its reflection on the life of the child. Whatever the prospective mother hears or thinks of, reacts on the child in the womb. In the Puranas, it is related that the mother of Prahlada once had the privilege of hearing discourses on Divine Love from the lips of Devarsi Narada, the result of which was that she got a child like Prahlada. The world can be greatly benefited even to-day if this truth is recognised and proper care is taken by society along this line. In Hinduism by means of purificatory rites (Samskaras) beginning from Garbhadhana (the rite performed before conception), the processes of which apart from their intrinsic merits are intended to awaken the spiritual

consciousness of the prospective parents,—the purification of the child is started when it is yet in the womb.

Not only impurities of the mind, but physical defects also are removed by the performance of Samskaras. The defects in the reproductive elements of the father and the mother are remedied by the performance of the Garbhadhana Samskara. Not only Garbhadhana (the process of conception), but all the life activities of an individual are regulated by sacred rites, each of which possess its own scientific value. Among the Samskaras, the ceremony of the sacred thread and the nuptial rites, etc., are quite well-known. These Samskaras purify the heart, and wipe out all wayward and sinful tendencies of the mind. There are innumerable people who must have been saved by their sacred thread from taking prohibited food and by the religious bond of marriage from leading a dissolute life.

All the Samskaras possess a purificatory power. 'Samskara' means washing out all **Chintamani**]

adventitious impurities and impurities are always adventitious. The self in its original state is stainless, free from all impurities. When all the impurities are removed through the performance of Samskaras or purificatory rites the transparent soul will automatically reveal itself. That is why so much emphasis is laid on Samskaras in Hinduism,—so much that even the cremation of a dead body is governed by prescribed rites (Anteyesti-Samskara).

Purity of Food

In its wider sense, the word 'Food' or nourishment means all that is taken in by the senses and the mind. Acharya Sankara has taken the word 'Ahara' (food) in this sense, so that purification of food, in this wider sense, would mean the purification of mind and heart. Truly speaking, it is not by the mouth alone that we take food, all the senses, take their respective food, and even without the co-operation of the senses, the mind alone takes its food. If all these senses including the internal sense, viz., the

mind are purified, that is, if the sense of hearing receives only words that are pure, the tongue as well utters only such words, the eyes behold only pure things, and likewise all other senses receive only pure objects, there can be nothing like it. But even if we are able to achieve purity of food in its gross, material sense, much can be achieved in the spiritual field.

The subtle elements of the food that we take enter into the composition of the mind, while its gross elements go to build and nourish the body and enter into the composition of its vital fluids. The thought or sentiment that operates behind the food, and the element of lawfulness or unlawfulness involved in procuring it, is bound to produce its effect on the person who takes the food. The food provided by a goldsmith is said to have given rise to the inclination for theft in the pure mind of a Sadhu (holy man); and food offered out of desire to get a child similarly led to some Sadhus who partook of it having a wet dream at night.

That is why in judging the purity of a dish both the sentiment of the person who offers it and the means by which it has been procured, have to be taken into consideration.

Besides this, there are other impurities connected with food, some of which are intrinsic and some adventitious. For instance, garlic and onion are impure by their very nature; they excite passions. Food which is otherwise pure, is polluted by the touch of a dog and by the glance of a vulture. Similarly the place where food is kept also determines its purity or otherwise. Even the purest of articles, kept in an impure place, are rendered unfit for consumption. The Hindu Scriptures contain many such rules for the regulation of diet, all of which are very helpful in protecting the body against inroads of diseases and in promoting mental and spiritual health. The physical and mental deterioration that is observed among the present generation is mainly attributable to their indifference in the matter of purity of food.

For the spiritual perfection of woman :

Hinduism upholds in view that worship should be offered to God alone. But it is not possible for all people to know God as He is. They have, therefore, first of all to conceive the presence of God at a particular place and thereby to develop their faith in Him till it has reached its perfection. The truth, however, is that God is present everywhere and manifest in every visible form. Wherever thought may be concentrated, there He can reveal Himself. For men, according to their respective stages of growth, we find various kinds of images recommended in the scriptures; whereas for women, the scriptures have prescribed that the gratification of carnal desire or propagation of species is not the ideal of Hindu marriage. The marriage of the Hindu is a form of initiation which provides the woman with an image through whose service she can bring her life to perfection. To visit temples and worship Images of God installed therein is no doubt highly desirable; but

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there are certain conditions in which it is not quite safe for women to undertake such worship. That is why the arrangement has been made to provide them with an image which they can worship wherever they may be. During the nuptial ceremony in Hinduism, the bride is offered to the bridegroom with the prayer that Bhagvan Vishnoo in the form of the bridegroom may accept the hand of the bride. The constant thought or remembrance of God is the only means through which God is made to reveal Himself or which leads an individual into His presence. If the wife looks upon her husband as God and performs all her duties, including the service of other members of the household, for the pleasure of her lord, her home can be transformed into Vaikuntha itself. The dignified position of the mistress of the household allotted to women in Hinduism, keeping in view the ideals of domestic peace, adjustment of social relations and attainment of spiritual perfection, has not been attained by the women of other countries—where the

ideal of life is to pursue and attain worldly objects alone—inspite of the material and scientific progress achieved by them. This fact is clearly proved by the number of divorce suits filed there every day.

Two halves of the Divine Body

Man and woman are not essentially different. They represent the two halves of the Divine Body and are thus complementary to each other. There is no question of superiority or inferiority between them. And yet owing to organic differences in their physical and mental constitutions, the duties and observances prescribed for men are different from those prescribed for women. As already pointed out above, the intellectual side is more developed in man; whereas the emotional side is more developed in the woman. Western scientists have ascertained through experiments that the male body throws out solar rays and female body throws out lunar rays. Women are temperamentally emotional, whereas the faculty of reasoning is stronger in men. This, how-

ever, does not imply that the faculty of reasoning can never be developed in women. It is fairly developed in some cases, but they are exceptions to the rule. The names Gargi, Maitreyi and Sulabha can be cited from the Upanisads as instances of this kind. But the majority of them are emotional by nature, that is why the duties prescribed for them are of the nature of austerities. The foremost consideration with the Hindu Sastras in framing a different set of rules for women has been to prevent them from being carried away by emotion. The fundamental idea behind the imposition of restriction on women has been to divert their mind from sense-enjoyment and encourage them to devote themselves wholly and solely to the worship of their Lord and thereby bring their lives to perfection.

Through devotion to and worship of her husband a woman can attain all that is possible to attain through worship of God. A man who attains Siddhi (perfection) through worship of God is called a Sat (saint), and a woman

who attains perfection through worship of her husband is known as a Sati, the two words being identical except for the difference in gender. Both the words indicate identity with God, who is the only reality (Sat). A woman who has attained the state of Satihood must be taken to have become one with God.

True love is possible in life only with a single individual. The centre of love is shifted not because of love but because of self-interest. The idea behind the institution of marriage in Hinduism is to foster, not self-interest, but love.

If the cultivation of true love and attainment of God had not been our aim then like other nations and countries there would have been freedom for woman even in Hinduism to establish marital relations with more than one man successively. Practice of self-restraint is the ideal of marriage in Hinduism. The system of attaching a woman to one man for a whole life-time has been introduced in order to save woman from the lustful gaze of many men, prevent her

from establishing promiscuous contacts and keep the lustful propensities under control. This has been termed in our Dharma-Sastras as Parisankhya-Vidhi (the rule of specification). That is why, even after the husband is dead, thought of any other man does not enter the mind of a Hindu Lady. It is indeed a matter for great concern and pity that ignoring this ancient and lofty ideal of Hinduism, the present-day Hindu society is anxious to follow in the footsteps of the West and instead of strengthening the ideals of Brahmacharya (continence) and Satihood (devotion to one husband) is misdirecting its energies towards promoting the ideal of sense-enjoyment. It should be remembered that marriage or the relation of husband and wife between man and woman, is not for enjoyment, but for the practice of self-restraint. This lofty ideal of sanctity of marriage and feminine chastity is a great gift of Hinduism to the world at large, and without adopting this ideal it can never be possible for the women of any nation or

country to attain peace in this world or the next, to say nothing of attaining spiritual peace.

Concentrated Thought :

Two types of worship have been recommended in the scriptures for God-Realisation, or realisation of the self. One of them is known as Ahangaraha Upasana or worship through identity of self with Brahma, and the other is called Pratikopasana or worship through an Image or representation of God. The first of these is suitable only for those who tread the path of Knowledge (Jnana). And the second, viz., Image-worship is regarded as suitable for practicants of all stages of growth. The true meaning of Image-worship is to contemplate God in every object that comes to the view of the practicant. This contemplation should be steady and concentrated. To attain steadiness in the fixity of concentration, the scriptures have suggested various methods. They recommend, inter alia, the installation with due ceremony and chanting of Vedic Mantras particular types of images in particular types of shrines.

Through this process of consecration or installation with due ceremony (Pratishtha), the image as well as the temple are impregnated with divine energy and this helps a good deal in attaining fixity of contemplation. This method of worship has proved very efficacious for conquerring the mind and opening the hidden spring of Divine Love. It is the best means of making God reveal Himself in Matter.

Even if God were not present in the image, He could easily be called there by force or concentrated thought on the part of the devotee or practicant; and if He is already there as everywhere, there should be no doubt about His manifesting Himself before the devotee? If God is conceived as formless though endowed with attributes, He must know the heart of His devotee and can fulfil the latter's desires; and being extremely compassionate He cannot withhold Himself from fulfilling the desire of the devotee. In that case, there seems to be no reason why He should not be propitiated through Image-worship. And if God is endowed with form,

as we Hindus believe, and it is His image that is worshiped then there is no reason why the mind should not get merged in Him and begin to see Him everywhere. Again, if God is an attributeless, Formless God, then there is nothing apart from God. When once it is realised that everything is God, the practicant will begin to see God everywhere and in that state worship is possible through any form. Image worship, in the case of Jnani (one who has realised God as his own self through the path of Knowledge) is the same as worship of the self, for he sees nothing but the self; in the case of the devotee, it is worship of his beloved God, for he sees his Beloved everywhere; and for aspirants in the paths of devotion and knowledge it is worship of God through Image. To realise God in all images, through worship of a particular image, is the object or goal of image-worship. He who cannot contemplate or behold God in an Image installed in a temple, how can he be expected to contemplate and see God anywhere else? Image worship is the

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most practical form of worship of God in its highest and noble sense. He who deprives himself of this form of worship will remain deprived of the realisation of infinite peace which one derives through seeing God everywhere and in every object. At one stage or another of his life he will be compelled to take this lesson from Hinduism.

No opposition to other Faiths :

God belongs to all and all belong to God. God also becomes restless and impatient to meet those who seek to attain Him. God does not take into account the caste, creed, or colour of His devotee, nor does He pay any heed to his discipline, morals or conduct. He judges him only by his heart. He who possesses a pure heart, and is eager to realise God, is bound to attain Him, to whatever religion, sect or creed he may belong. Then why should we quarrel with anybody on the score of his religious persuasions or creed? One can commence his Godward journey from the very stage of evolution at which he stands. The path opens out for him wherever

he starts from. Dharma is nothing else then this Godward path, and as such it may be different for every individual. Then where lies the point in quarrelling with one who is treading a different path? He too is proceeding towards God just as we are doing. Let him look to his own path and let me follow my own, why should we look into each other's path at all? This point of view has been emphasised at many places in our scriptures. The old warrior Bhishma, laying on his bed of arrows, offered his obeisance to God in the following words :—"I pay my obeisance to God, the soul of all religions—who is worshipped by votaries of different religions, with the desire of obtaining different rewards, through observance of practices recommended by different religions." Again, Sri Yajnavalkya says: "The religion that interferes with another religion is no religion at all; it is a pseudo-religion, the religion that offers no opposition to other religions is Religion in the true sense of the term."

धर्मं यो बाधते धर्मो न स धर्मः कुधर्मं तत्
अविरोधी तु यो धर्मः स धर्मो मुनिपुङ्गव ॥

Every religion takes its votaries independently to the goal along its own path. To declare one path superior to another indicates narrowness of heart, and the attempt to unify all the paths is both fruitless and impossible. Every attempt made up till now to establish one Universal Religion has gone to add a new sect to the already existing number. Therefore instead of wasting one's time and energy in quarrelling with other religions, the duty of every individual lies in carefully observing the practices of one's own religion. The antagonism and spirit of rivalry existing among the different religions can be removed only through a wider acceptance of this teaching and attitude of Hinduism.

How to understand Dharma ?

There are various methods of propaganda prevalent in the world for preaching and propagating the message of religion. People assemble in huge conclave where discourses are held, and now and then cases come to light of even force being applied to convert one individual to a particular faith. Hinduism

does not set much store by these methods. Dharma is a matter concerning the heart. One whose heart refuses to accept the principles of Dharma can never be convinced by means of discourses and speeches, nor can application of force do him any good. The utility of Dharma lies in releasing the individual from the bondage of the ego. If an individual begins to imagine that he is already a religious man, that he has understood and realised the truth of religion, and assumes the role of a preacher of religion, he is gradually driven farther away from religion, possessed as he is by the ego. All his attempts to infuse religiosity into the life of his fellow-men prove abortive and his teachings lead nowhere. That is why in ancient India, the modern practice of preaching religion through public discourses was not in vogue. True seekers of religion used to approach the Guru in all humility and reverence and offer him their personal services, thus gradually imbibed from him a knowledge of the theory and practice of religion.

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The general rule prevailing in those days was 'नारुष्टः कस्यचिद् ब्रूयात्' no one should be instructed in religion unless requested. The main reason why religious discourses do not produce the desired effect nowadays lies in the fact, instruction is generally given to people who are not qualified to receive instruction, and the preacher himself, being subject to pride, greed and similar other weaknesses; does not possess the necessary qualification to preach.

Religious discourses that are unsolicited are generally actuated by Rajasic and Tamasic impulses. They can be Sattvic only under one circumstance. This is when a Mahapurusa (Great soul) moved to pity at the sight of gross neglect of Dharma on the part of the people can no longer restrain himself and comes forward to point out the right path to those who are treading the wrong path without their asking. His instruction can certainly have the intended effect on the people and transform their lives. Such a soul can never be possessed by pride, greed and the like. The world is

invariably benefitted by people like him.

Observing the irreligious mentality of the present-day world, many a noble souls possessing love for Dharma begin to feel the necessity of religious propaganda and enter the field as religious preachers; but soon after instead of propagating religion, they begin indirectly to inculcate respect for their own personality. Such men should scrupulously avoid the propagation of their own personal views and fads and make it a point to preach only the message and glory of the Sastras (Scriptures).

Whatever they preach, should be based on the Sastras. The instructions about Dharma contained in the Sastras are so extensive that it is not at all necessary for any preacher to go beyond them. This also they should undertake only to draw out the latent spirit of enquiry

about Dharma lying in every heart. When this spirit is roused, every individual will on his own initiative proceed to learn the truths of Dharma from a study of the scriptures and personal service of his elders and teachers. Under such circumstances alone can the teachings of Religion be propagated in their true spirit.

These are a few distinguishing features of Hinduism, which we have briefly attempted to place before our readers. We now pray that the God of Dharma may be propitiated through this feeble attempt of ours and inspire us all to devote our lives to the practice of Dharma.

सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः सर्वे सन्तु निरामयाः ।
सर्वे मद्राणि पश्यन्तु मा कश्चिद्दुःखमाप्नुयात् ॥

“Let all be happy, let all enjoy health, Let all see happy days and let none suffer from any calamity or affliction.”